

Volunteers brighten seniors' day

By HALEY HUGHES
Staff writer

Easter bunnies made an early appearance in Aiken County Friday.

Tracy Hoshell and her husband volunteered their time to hand deliver Easter baskets full of goodies to older area residents who needed some cheering up or just a friendly, available ear to talk to.

United Way of Aiken County and the Aiken Area Council on Aging have teamed up again this year with "Be a Bunny," a project that asks local businesses, individuals and civic organizations to put together baskets for senior citizens of the Council on Aging, local nursing homes and Meals on Wheels.

The baskets usually hold items such as toiletries, light bulbs, batteries, crossword puzzles and Easter treats.

"They're filled with 'comfort items,'" said Melissa Basile, director of marketing for United Way of Aiken County. "We did nearly 1,000 baskets this year."

The number has risen considerably from last year's total of around 900.

"The Aiken community has been extremely generous," Basile said. "The community really just went above and beyond this year."

The baskets were wrapped with colorful spring- and Easter-themed cellophane, some topped with a plush, stuffed duck or rabbit.

UPS and Aiken High School were among those who donated a number of baskets.

"Be a Bunny" began when United Way and the Council on Aging expressed interest in starting an outreach program to benefit senior citizens year-round. Most people typically think of senior citizens only around the holiday season, Basile said.

"We're thinking of you," Hoshell told Betty Sanders as she handed over the gaily wrapped gift basket at Sanders Graniteville home.

"I just thrills me to know somebody cares," Sanders said. "I can't wait to get into it (the basket)."

Agnes Williams, also of Graniteville, seemed like she couldn't believe the large basket Tracy handed over was hers.

"That's mine?" Williams asked. "Isn't that pretty?"

Aiken Standard
Aiken, SC
Circ. 15361
From Page:
2
3/31/2007
66000





Aiken Standard
Aiken, SC
Circ. 15361
From Page:
2
3/31/2007
66000



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Tracy Hoshell, left, gives a basket to Betty Sanders donated to United Way of Aiken County and the Aiken Area Council on Aging's "Be a Bunny." Below, Hoshell gives Agnes Williams an Easter basket.

